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WASHINGTON

CASEY CITED FOR REVIVING CIA
BY DANIEL F. GILMORE

William J. Casey, the CIA's controversial director, was awarded the agency's highest medal "for outstanding leadership" Thursday during a surprise ceremony at Langley, Va., headquarters.

A citation read by Deputy Director John McMahon said Casey was awarded the Distinguished Intelligence Medal for restoring the credibility of the CIA and bringing "imagination to our operation."

A self-made multimillionaire and manager of Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, Casey has served as the nation's top spy since 1981 and has been involved in a number of controversies -- the latest being disclosure that the Republican campaign obtained a copy of President Carter's briefing book before a crucial 1979 television debate with Reagan. Casey denied involvement in the affair.

"(Casey's) unique insight into the needs of our policy makers has brought imagination to our operation and relevance to our analysis," the citation said in part. "His experience and deep appreciation of world affairs add immeasurably to the credibility of our product and fulfillment of our mission. Mr. Casey's performance is in the highest tradition of federal service."

Casey took charge of the CIA with a White House mandate to strengthen covert operations and defend U.S. interests around the globe.

Casey was no stranger to cloak and dagger affairs. He served as chief of secret intelligence in Europe for the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's predecessor, during World War II.

Still there were congressional doubts about Casey's long absence from intelligence matters and he soon came under scrutiny on a number of matters, including his financial affairs.

CIA veterans, however, have stoutly backed his leadership.

Casey made his fortune in Wall Street as a high-priced corporate lawyer. He also served in Washington as head of the Securities and Exchange Commission, assistant secretary of state for economic affairs and president of the Export-Import Bank in the Nixon and Ford administrations.

His Reagan campaign activities in 1979 were challenged this summer when, in answer to congressional queries, a White House official said he believed Casey supplied the Carter briefing book. Casey denied involvement.

He told The New York Times in July it would have been "totally uncharacteristic and quite incredible" for him to have obtained such material. "I wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole," he said.

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CASEY GIVEN INTELLIGENCE AWARD

CIA Director William J. Casey on Thursday was awarded the Distinguished Intelligence Medal, the highest award given to a U.S. intelligence official.

Deputy director John McMahon bestowed the award on Casey at a "surprise" ceremony at Central Intelligence Agency headquarters in suburban Langley, Va., according to CIA spokesman Dale Peterson.

"Under his guidance and direction, the agency has been strengthened and its health restored," McMahon said in presenting Casey the award. "His unique insight into the needs of our policymakers has brought imagination to our operations and relevance to our analysis."

Since Casey took over the CIA in January 1981, the agency has sharply increased its budget and activities, according to officials familiar with its secret operations. Casey has also overseen major covert actions, including the now widely known CIA support for Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries.

Peterson said the award is presented infrequently, but he did not know how many other times the gold medal has been given. Peterson said McMahon has the authority to grant the award.

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